

# ***Iowa Outdoors***

## **Iowa Department of Natural Resources**

### **www.iowadnr.com**

Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653  
[mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us)

\*\*\*\*\*

**Dec. 2, 2003**

1. Shotgun Deer Season Preview – by Joe Wilkinson [editor's, please hold this story until Thursday]
2. Think Safety First, Deer Hunters
3. New Fishing Regulations, License Fees Take Effect Soon
4. Low Streams, Dry Fish – by Joe Wilkinson
5. 17 Ice Fishing Clinics Scheduled

## **SHOTGUN DEER SEASON PREVIEW**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Hunting for a trophy buck, or just filling your freezer? You can do both this deer season, and still go back for more.

For years, many deer hunters have watched does and fawns trot by, waiting instead for a shot at a wall-hanger buck. In recent years, extra 'anterless' tags, seasons and bonus zones have helped boost the annual whitetail harvest. This year, an additional 30,000 antlerless tags are available. "Our surveys indicate populations are probably about 20 percent higher than we would like," notes Department of Natural Resources deer biologist Willy Suchy. "With the extra tags, a hunter can shoot a doe right off the bat and then hunt selectively for a buck. It gives hunters the chance to manage their harvest."

Hunters in Iowa's youth, disabled, bow and early muzzleloader deer seasons have been out already. However, deer hunting gets underway in a *big* way this Saturday. Close to 100,000 hunters will head to the woods in the first shotgun season (Dec. 6 to 10). Another 60,000 hunt the second season (Dec. 13 to 21). Wildlife officials feel that hunters may pass up a small buck, if they have already dropped a doe. They could then wait for that trophy rack, yet still have a deer to take home if they don't get it. "That allows younger bucks to grow and improves the quality of the herd, while controlling deer numbers," emphasizes Suchy. "With the abundant tags available, we should have a real good deer season. Shotgun season hunters should be looking at a record harvest."

Those 'county specific' antlerless tags are going fast. By Monday morning, quotas had been reached in 46 counties, with a dozen more nearly met. Other antlerless tags have been available this fall in 22 special zone hunts (primarily in state or county parks) and through farm unit depredation programs. Another incentive is the expansion of the late January (11 to 19) season from southern Iowa to the entire state.

Getting the tags is the easy part. From there, you have to be in the right place as wary whitetails react to the opening day invasion. "Deer are real adaptable," reminds Suchy. "Once they figure out what's going on; once they get through one or two drives, they'll find the overlooked places." He says those range from a weedy fencerow, to an out of the way ravine, to a CRP field, even a willow thicket below a pond. A year ago, our group pushed a wide, flat creek bed for the first time. Though it sat just a mile from the timber and limestone bluffs we regularly hunt, we had ignored it, and so did surrounding hunters. At least three does escaped out the side, during the drive. One buck did not; our only deer on opening day.

Another hunter miscue is to ignore a deer's primary defense...its nose. Any bow hunter has stories about deer walking in on them, only to hit an invisible 'wall' with a whiff of human scent. Shotgun hunters should remember that, too. "Deer want to head into the wind, when threatened. Take that wind direction into account when you set up a drive," urges Suchy. "Ideally, you want deer heading into a cross wind, so they will not (go straight at and) smell the standers."

Even if the *wind* is on your side, you still have to contend with those big, cupped ears. "Loud talking, car doors slamming, that sort of thing tips them off," emphasized Suchy, as we stood outside a week or so ago. "A pickup roaring through a field, where there hasn't been one all year; that's the sort of thing to avoid." As if on cue, he pointed behind me. I turned just in time to see a monster buck disappear down a slope. He had been bedded down 50 yards away, on a brushy fence line. He tolerated our intrusion for a couple minutes, but no more. His escape route? Even though an empty state park was to the east, he steered his 10-point rack west...straight into the wind.

When all the seasons close, though, more than 100,000 hunters will have had the skill—or the luck—to bring home a deer. The stories usually favor skill over luck. Still, luck is often described as taking advantage of the right situation. Either way works in an Iowa deer season.

###

## **THINK SAFETY FIRST, DEER HUNTERS**

DES MOINES - The first of Iowa's two shotgun deer seasons begins Dec. 6, and the DNR is expecting more than 100,000 hunters to flood Iowa's timber looking for its prized whitetails. The second shotgun season begins Dec. 13, with an estimated 60,000 hunters participating.

Rod Slings, recreational safety program supervisor with the DNR, said shotgun deer hunters need to plan their hunt, keeping safety at the forefront.

With additional deer tag's available this year, more shots will be taken to harvest these deer. "Before taking that shot, make sure you know where your hunting companions are because once you pull that trigger, you cannot call the shot back," Slings said.

Deer hunting is steeped with tradition in Iowa from the 4 a.m. pancake feeds at the local fire station, to passing the torch to the next generation of hunters. Slings advises that a pre-hunt meeting with all members of the group should be added to that tradition.

"The traditional Iowa deer hunt with shotguns is to have certain members of the hunting group (drivers) push deer through a timber toward other members who are standing (standers) at the opposite end. The hunting plan should layout what role each hunter has, where they will be and when they will be there, and hunters need to stick with that plan," Slings said. "Problems start when someone violates that plan and are not where they should have been."

Past hunting incident investigations indicate that when a deer runs between members of a hunting party a shot can result in striking one of the members. Shooting at "running" deer is the number one cause in Iowa that can result in a hunting related shooting. Slings reminds everyone to be sure of your target and what lies beyond it. Don't get caught up with "target fixation".

**For more information, contact Slings at 515-281-8652.**

###

## **NEW FISHING REGULATIONS, LICENSE FEES TAKE EFFECT SOON**

DES MOINES - A number of changes to Iowa fishing regulations become effective on Jan. 14. New regulations affect trout fishing, and add panfish bag limits on the Mississippi River, a closed season on fishing below the dams at three locations on the Mississippi River, and length limits on bass and walleye at two lakes.

The new regulation on trout fishing requires that anyone specifically fishing for trout to purchase the Trout Fee. The law previously required only anglers who possessed trout to purchase the fee.

“Requiring all people who fish for trout will help to support the trout fishery,” said Marion Conover, chief of the DNR’s fisheries bureau. “In the past, there were a number of anglers who paid the trout fee even though they were not required to do so, just to support the resource. We feel this new requirement will continue the program and benefit all trout anglers.”

The exception to the trout fee requirement is anyone under 16 years old is not required to purchase the fee if they fish with a properly licensed adult who has purchased the trout fee and they limit their catch to the daily limit for one person.

Most of the regulation changes affect anglers fishing on the Mississippi River. Walleyes measuring from 20 inches to 27 inches caught from Pools 12 through 20 must be immediately released alive. Anglers may keep one walleye per day longer than 27 inches from those pools.

In an effort to protect the walleye and sauger fishery in the upper Mississippi River, the DNR set a fishing season on areas below the navigation dams on pools 11 to 13. The closed season runs from Dec. 1 through March 15 of the following year, except this first year when the closed season begins Jan. 14, 2004.

The closed areas are from Dam 11 at Dubuque downstream to the Hwy. 61/151 bridge; from Dam 12 at Bellevue downstream to the mouth of Mill Creek, near river mile 556.0; and from Dam 13 at Clinton to the downstream end of Stamp Island near river mile 521.5. The walleye and sauger population is vulnerable during the winter months.

The final fishing regulation change on the Mississippi is the addition of a panfish bag limit.

Starting Jan. 14, 2004 there will be a daily bag limit of 25 fish for crappie, rock bass and yellow perch individually; and combined for bluegill and pumpkinseed; and combined for white and yellow bass. The possession limit is twice the daily bag limit: 50.

“We have been working with agencies in Illinois and Wisconsin to come to a consensus on panfish bag limits to reduce confusion among anglers,” Conover said. “All the states adopted the same regulations which were supported by a good majority of the anglers.”

Other new fishing regulations include adding a 15-inch minimum length limit for walleyes in Viking Lake. Viking Lake began stocking walleye fingerlings in 2003 as part of a study to control yellow bass. The daily bag limit on walleye is three with a possession limit of six.

Lastly, Ada Hayden Heritage Park, in Story County, added an 18-inch minimum length limit on bass.

Fishing license fees were restructured and increased during the 2003 legislative session. Those new prices are effective Dec. 15, when 2004 licenses go on sale. This is the first increase in the price of a fishing license since 1992. There is no longer a fish habitat fee.

New license fees

Iowa Resident Fishing License: \$17.50

Resident 7-day: \$12

Resident 1-day: \$8

Resident Trout Fee: \$11

Nonresident Fishing License: \$39.50

Nonresident 7-day: \$30.50

Nonresident 3-day: \$16

Nonresident 1-day: \$9

Nonresident Trout Fee: \$13.50

**For more information, contact Conover at 515-281-5208.**

###

## **LOW STREAMS, DRY FISH**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

You thought the long, hot summer was dry. Even with heavy rain across Iowa in early November, we now head into winter with many streams at a trickle. That will be felt not only by fish and other river wildlife, but the anglers and others who utilize the rivers.

Maybe you've noticed the wide sandbars, exposed mud flats, high banks and other evidence of low water as you drive across streams this fall. Data from the U.S. Geological Survey-Iowa District underscores the scenario. A sampling from 15 gaging stations across the state shows flows from Sept. 15 to Nov. 15 at from 56 percent to only two percent of the long-term average from the same time period.

It's something the fish in our streams have already felt. "As flows go down, fish move, if possible, downstream to better habitat," explains Department of Natural Resources fisheries management biologist Brian Hayes. "Streams with good habitat; pools, riffles will retain those fish. On streams that are channelized; highly altered, lacking good habitat; fish are going to be vulnerable." Hayes points out, that on many interior streams, fish are locked into certain stretches, where dams impede migration to better winter areas.

Where they do locate pockets of habitat, fish are concentrated, competing for food. That puts this year's hatch of game fish, for instance, on the dinner table for larger fish they might have escaped in a high-water year. "Those younger fish are vulnerable," notes Hayes, based in Manchester, in northeast Iowa. "We also will be looking at slower growth rates after periods of low flows. (Stream) anglers will be concerned about smallmouth bass and catfish right away, but it is going to affect all species; from the minnows, darters and suckers on up. It starts clear up in the tributaries." Crews were already monitoring trout streams this summer and fall. "We had some flows as low as ever documented, in periodic monitoring," notes Hayes. On a positive note, though, he points to the soaking rains of early November and the critical recharge they provided groundwater and streams.

Winter application of manure or domestic sludge is common in the winter. That raises a caution flag, too. "With low flows, you don't get as great a dilution of pollutants as you would in a normal year," assesses DNR environmental specialist Mike Wade. "We don't recommend it, but winter application is not illegal." He urges that it be avoided. "Besides the threat of runoff, low streams don't provide for the natural exchange of water in a pool either," says Wade. "For example, a pollutant might sit in the water for days, instead of an hour...becoming more toxic to aquatic life."

As winter ice grips much of Iowa's streams and backwaters, another concern rises; one building for years on the Mississippi River system. DNR fisheries biologist Scott Gritters pointed it out as we worked our way through a backwater near Harpers Ferry a few days ago. "This is good habitat yet; four, 4 1/2 feet deep. That's becoming a rarity, though, for backwaters on the Mississippi River." While the low water flows were obvious here, too, Mississippi anglers and fish also see creation of a huge 'vice'. Silt reduces habitat from below. Winter ice eats into it from above. "Since the 1930s, when the locks and dams were built, we have seen backwater sedimentation of about a half-inch per year," says Gritters. "That's 30, 35 inches of siltation! It has basically filled up the bottoms. If we get two feet of ice on top of that, it really squeezes the fish."

Panfish; largemouth bass, crappies and bluegills require backwaters with no current—and sufficient oxygen—for winter survival. Sloughs that used to be eight or nine feet deep now hold just six feet of water. Those formerly four to five feet deep, now freeze solid. And fish pull oxygen only from the water, not ice. Dredging restores depth, but at a million dollars plus, per project, it is not an easy answer. "First of all we have to keep silt out of the Mississippi as much as possible," points out Gritters. "That's the big solution."

It's a winter dilemma with a big time impact.

### **Making Good Habitat Better**

While it doesn't create *more* deep water, basic improvements help what is already out there. As DNR fisheries biologist Scott Gritters pointed his electroshocking boat into

the deepest stretch of backwater in lower Harpers Lake, hundreds of stunned crappies, bluegills and bass floated to the surface. A well-placed line of concrete blocks and cedar trees had created ideal over-winter habitat. “We are seeing unbelievable numbers of fish,” admitted Gritters. “This effort—this habitat—is just what the area needs.” He, DNR technician Karen Aulwes and Robert Vavra, from the local Harpers River Friends club scooped up all the fish as they could reach to record measurements before slipping them back into the 44 degree water. Many of the crappies were 12 to 14 inches or longer.

Vavra is sold on the recent club project. “Fishing here has slowed down year after year. We decided that structure--winter structure--was the key. It is incredible what a few days effort, and not a lot of expense, can do. This is what drives the economy of Harpers Ferry; the seasonal tourists, fishing and hunting.” Vavra says the ice anglers that follow, and the improved warm weather fish numbers will boost area recreation and spending.

### **Water Flow Lags in Sample Streams**

South Skunk at Ames... 2% of normal long term flow  
North near Norwalk....19%  
Des Moines at Ottumwa....21%  
Floyd at Alton....22%  
Winnebago at Mason City...22%  
Wapsipinicon at Independence...23%  
North Raccoon at Van Meter...25%  
Upper Iowa at Decorah... 26%  
Nishnabotna at Hamburg... 27%  
Little Sioux at Correctionville... 29%  
Rock at Rock Valley... 39%  
Wapsipinicon at DeWitt... 48%  
Cedar at Conesville... 48%  
Boyer at Logan... 49%  
Iowa at Marengo... 56%

(Information from U.S. Geological Survey; <http://ia.water.usgs.gov>  
September 15-November 15, 2003 records range from 33 to 88 years)

###

## **17 ICE FISHING CLINICS SCHEDULED**

DES MOINES – There are 17 free ice fishing clinics scheduled around Iowa. Activities vary at each clinic, but participants can expect to learn basic safety tips while on the ice and different ice fishing techniques and bait presentations. Participants should

prepare to be outdoors for an extended amount of time. Hats and mittens are essential along with a good pair of boots.

Contact the clinic for more information.

<b>Jan. 10</b>	<b>Hillview Recreation Area, Hinton</b>	<b>712-947-4270</b>
<b>Jan. 10</b>	<b>Lake Pahoja, Larchwood</b>	<b>712-472-2217</b>
<b>Jan. 10</b>	<b>Clarke Lake, Mason City</b>	<b>641-423-5309</b>
<b>Jan. 17</b>	<b>Fort Des Moines Park, Des Moines</b>	<b>515-323-5361</b>
<b>Jan. 17</b>	<b>McFarland Park Lake, Ames</b>	<b>515-232-2516</b>
<b>Jan. 17</b>	<b>Mile Hill Lake, Glenwood</b>	<b>712-527-9685</b>
<b>Jan. 17</b>	<b>F.W. Kent Park, Tiffin</b>	<b>319-645-2315</b>
<b>Jan. 17</b>	<b>Jefferson County Park, Fairfield</b>	<b>641-472-4421</b>
<b>Jan. 18</b>	<b>Central Park Lake, Center Junction</b>	<b>563-487-3541</b>
<b>Jan. 24</b>	<b>Winterfeld Boating and Fishing Area, Rock Valley</b>	<b>712-552-3057</b>
<b>Jan. 24</b>	<b>New Hope Christian Church, Marshalltown</b>	<b>641-753-0283</b>
<b>Jan. 24</b>	<b>Arrowhead Park, Neola</b>	<b>712-485-2295</b>
<b>Jan. 24</b>	<b>Eldred Sherwood Park, Goodell</b>	<b>641-923-9980</b>
<b>Jan. 25</b>	<b>McGowen Recreation and Wildlife Area, Bloomfield</b>	<b>641-664-2572</b>
<b>Jan. 31</b>	<b>Mill Creek Park, Paullina</b>	<b>712-448-2254</b>
<b>Feb. 7</b>	<b>Russell Wildlife Area Pond, Oskaloosa</b>	<b>641-673-9327</b>
<b>Feb. 7</b>	<b>Easter Lake Park, Des Moines</b>	<b>515-323-5361</b>

###